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SOURCE Le Monde.

PETROLEUM EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION
IN FRENCH NORTH AFRICA

J. Pelissier

[Comment: In recent years, efforts have been intensified to determine and exploit the petroleum resources of French North Africa. At present, large-scale petroleum exploration operations are being carried out or projected there by a number of local and foreign firms, with or without government assistance.

The following information, based on an article by J. Pelissier, published in the 21 December 1952 issue of the Paris daily newspaper Le Monde, outlines the efforts being made in French North Africa to discover and exploit the petroleum resources in the area. Emphasis is placed on the government agencies and private firms concerned, on the specific areas where important exploration and exploitation operations are going on, and on the future prospects of petroleum production in French North Africa.

A map showing areas assigned to petroleum companies for prospecting and/or exploitation is appended.

Algeria

At the opening of the ordinary session of the Algerian Assembly on 19 November 1952, the Governor General of Algeria placed particular stress on the petroleum explorations being carried out in Algeria at an ever-increasing rate. He emphasized especially the increase in production registered at the Oued Gueterini oil field and the intensification of prospecting operations taking place in the region north of the Saharan Basin, in the Mزاب region, and in the areas located farther to the south.

A decree issued on 19 November 1952 authorized the RAP (Regie Autonome des Petroles, Autonomous Petroleum Administration) to purchase shares in the following companies, which are currently in the process of being organized:

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1. The CREPS (Compagnie de Recherches et d'Exploitation de Petrole au Sahara, Sahara Petroleum Exploration and Exploitation Company), between a minimum of 51 percent and a maximum of 90 percent of its total capital.

2. The CPA (Compagnie des Petroles d'Algeria, Petroleum Company of Algeria), up to a maximum of 35 percent of its total capital.

A decree issued on 21 November 1952 authorized the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole (Office of Petroleum Explorations) to purchase shares in the CREPS and CPA up to 5 percent of their total capital.

Systematic petroleum explorations have been going on in Algeria since 1941 under the sponsorship of the Service des Recherches Minieres (Mining Exploration Service). They have been continued since 1946 on a larger scale by the SNREPAL (Societe Nationale de Recherches et d'Exploitation des Petroles en Algerie, National Company for Petroleum Explorations and Exploitation in Algeria), which is owned equally by the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole and the Government General of Algeria.

The explorations carried out to date by the Service des Recherches Minieres and the SNREPAL show the following regions to be the most promising in Algeria from the standpoint of petroleum resources: (1) the Chelif, Mitidja, and Hodna Mio-Pliocene basins; (2) the eastern section of the Constantine Department; (3) the southern fringe of the Saharan Atlas Mountains; (4) the northern fringe of the High Plateaus; and (5) the Sahara.

Outfitted with modern and powerful machinery and equipment, the SNREPAL drilled a total of 30,265 meters in 1951, as compared with 26,798 in 1950 and 14,650 in 1949. At present, drilling operations are being carried out in the Chelif basin, the Sidi Aissa region, the eastern section of the Constantine Department, and the Sahara.

Particularly good results have been obtained at the Oued Gueterini field, in the Sidi Aissa region, where the SNREPAL is working for the Societe des Petroles d'Aumale (Aumale Petroleum Company), a joint-stock company which is owned equally by the SNREPAL and the RAFAL (Societe des Raffineries Algeriennes, Algerian Refineries Company). At present, about 20 oil wells are being worked in the Oued Gueterini field: some of them are gushers and the remainder are pump-operated. Their total 1952 output is estimated at between 30,000 and 35,000 tons, as compared with 7,200 in 1951. The present rate of output of the Oued Gueterini field is over 200 tons of crude oil daily, which is refined at Berre [France?] where it is converted to light oil in sufficient quantities to satisfy approximately 10 percent of the total Algerian demand for this product.

The SNREPAL has applied for a petroleum exploration permit covering an area of approximately 40,000 square kilometers in the Colomb Bechar region. Meanwhile, on 16 October 1952, this company had obtained petroleum exploration permits covering an area of 116,000 square kilometers, which overlaps an area of about equal size for which exploration permits were issued on the same date to the Compagnie Francaise des Petroles (French Petroleum Company). The total area to be explored by these two companies extends roughly from Biskra to El Golea and between Figuig and the southern portion of the Algerian-Tunisian border.

Geological, gravimetric, and seismic studies are being actively pursued. The SNREPAL has undertaken a drilling operation with a large rig near Berriane, in the Ghardaia region. It has also recently set up a medium-size rig near Tarit, in the Colomb Bechar region.

Farther south, explorations will be carried out by the CPA, a subsidiary of the Shell Oil Company, and the CREPS, a subsidiary of the RAP.

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The CPA will be formed by the Shell Oil Company (65 percent), the RAP (30 percent), and the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole (5 percent). It plans to explore an area of approximately 240,000 square kilometers, located between the Grand Erg Occidental and the Grand Erg Oriental, south of the areas to be explored by the SNREPAL and the Compagnie Francaise des Petroles. An exclusive exploration permit was applied for by the Shell Oil Company in February 1952.

The CREPS will be formed by the Shell Oil Company (35 percent) and a group of French interests (65 percent), including the RAP, the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole, and the SNREPAL. In February 1952, the RAP applied for an exploration permit covering an area of approximately 190,000 square kilometers, which extends from Adrar to the Algerian-Tripolitanian border, south of the area for whose exploration the CPA has applied.

Large-scale aerial photographic surveys have been successfully carried out by the French Institut Geographique National (National Geographic Institute). The photographs are now being interpreted with the assistance of the Institut Francais du Petrol (French Petroleum Institute). A program of geological studies is already under way. A base of operations is being set up at In Salah. The first drilling is scheduled to take place toward the end of 1953.

French Morocco

In French Morocco, petroleum explorations are carried on by the Societe Cherifienne des Petroles (Sherifian Petroleum Company), whose principal stockholders are the Bureau de Recherches et de Participations Minieres (Mining Exploration and Shareholding Office) and the Bureau de Recherches de Petroles (Petroleum Exploration Office).

The Societe Cherifienne des Petroles operates over a total area of approximately 21,000 square kilometers in the Rharb and Prerif regions. In 1951, its drillings totaled 93,880 meters, as compared with 77,477 in 1950 and 65,000 in 1949.

At present, the most productive area in French Morocco is that of Oued Beth, where many small petroleum deposits have been discovered in recent years. Other productive areas worthy of mention are the Baton field (discovered in 1947), the Mellah field (discovered in 1949), the Sidi Fili deposit (discovered in 1950), the Mers el Kharez deposit (discovered in 1951), and the Bled Eddoun area, where production was begun recently.

In 1951, the Baton and Mellah fields produced 19,000 and 9,500 tons of crude oil respectively. The Sidi Fili deposit, which yielded more than 29,000 tons in 1951, now produces about 150 tons daily. The Mers el Kharez deposits currently has a daily output of about 50 tons. Total crude oil production in French Morocco amounted to 75,667 tons in 1951 and 53,000 tons during the first half of 1952. Total daily production at present comes to approximately 300 tons.

Meanwhile, geological and geophysical surveys are being made in the Rharb and neighboring regions, particularly in the Sais area (in the Meknes region) where exploration drillings have already been undertaken.

The crude oil of the Societe Cherifienne des Petroles is refined at the Petitjean refinery, where a catalytic cracking installation is soon to be set up.

It is to be noted that the Societe Cherifienne des Petroles is already financing itself almost entirely and meeting between 10 and 15 percent of French Morocco's demand for petroleum products.

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Tunisia

Petroleum explorations in Tunisia at present are carried on by the following companies:

1. The SEREPT (Societe de Recherches et d'Exploitation des Petroles de Tunisie, Petroleum Exploration and Exploitation Company of Tunisia), whose principal stockholders are the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole (56 percent) and the Tunisian government (30 percent).
2. The CPDT (Compagnie des Petroles de Tunisie, Petroleum Company of Tunisia), whose stockholders are the Shell Oil Company (65 percent) and the SEREPT (35 percent).
3. The SNAP (Societe Nord-Africaine des Petroles, North African Petroleum Company), whose stockholders are the Gulf Oil Company (65 percent) and the SEREPT (35 percent).

In its assigned area of exploration, which covers 46,240 square kilometers and extends practically from Bizerte to Tripolitania, the SEREPT drilled a total of 9,546 meters in 1951, as compared with 5,467 in 1950. In 1949, a high-pressure gas deposit was discovered on Cape Bon. Three of the seven drillings made there have proved productive, and it is estimated that this deposit can supply Tunis with all the gas it needs for a period of between 10 and 15 years.

At present, the SEREPT is drilling at the following places:

1. Northeast Tunisia -- Kelibia and Enfidaville.
2. Central Tunisia -- The area south of Maktar, where the Djebel Bahloul drilling recently struck oil and gas.
3. Southern Tunisia -- In the Chott Fedjedj, west of Gabes.

The CPDT has an exploration permit covering an area of 15,152 square kilometers, located north of the Sahel region. A drilling has already been made at Zeramdine, near Sousse, and another is being made at Ktitir, south of Kairouan.

The SNAP, which has three exploration permits covering a total area of 19,600 square kilometers in the Sfax region and on the islands of Kerkennah and Djerba, is currently drilling at Sainte Juliette, north of Sfax.

General Conclusions

Since 1945, a veritable petroleum exploration policy has been developed in French North Africa, principally under the impetus received from the Bureau de Recherches de Petrole. As a result, a new industry has been developed which already comprises important firms equipped with financial, human, and technical means on an international scale.

This effort is already bearing fruit, as economically exploitable petroleum deposits are discovered at an ever-increasing rate in French Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

Although the success achieved thus far is still moderate, it is already enabling some of the companies in question to finance their new exploration operations.

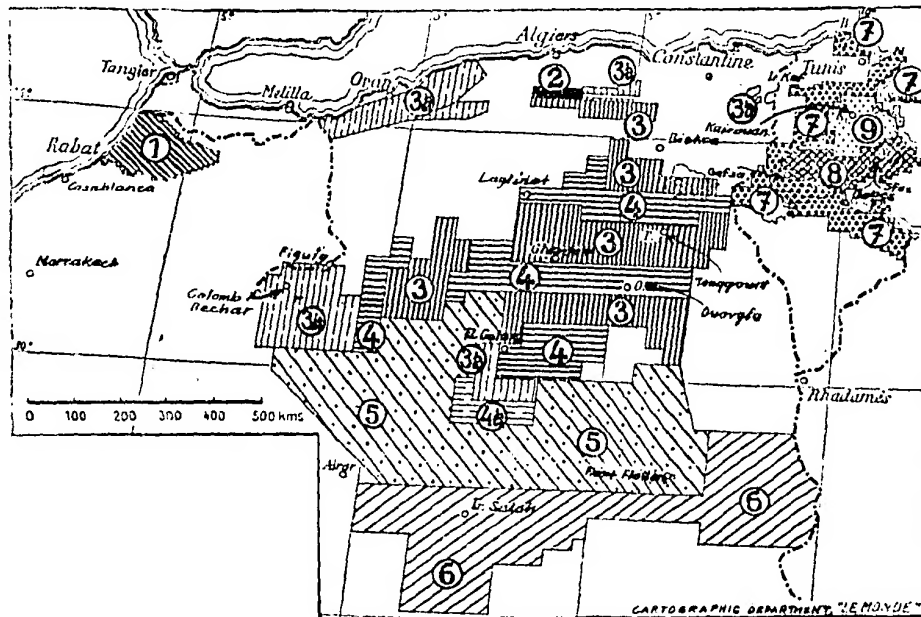
In Tunisia and Algeria, some foreign groups have been induced to participate in these operations by flexible legal provisions which reconcile their interests with those of the countries concerned.

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The Sahara, long considered worthless from an economic standpoint, is now drawing the attention of many petroleum concerns, because there is a strong belief that it contains hydrocarbon deposits.

[The 7 November 1952 issue of the Tunis daily newspaper La Depeche Tunisienne reported that a well of the SEREPT had recently struck oil at Kesra, 15 kilometers from Maktar. According to the report, large quantities of thick petroleum mixed with gas had gushed forth. The report added that steps were being taken to determine the extent of the deposit discovered.]

Areas Assigned to Petroleum Companies



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1. Societe Cherifienne des Petroles
2. Societe des Petroles d'Aumale
3. SNREPAL (areas for which exploration permits have been issued)
- 3a. SNREPAL (areas for which exploration permits are still pending)
4. Compagnie Francaise des Petroles (areas for which exploration permits have been issued)
- 4a. Compagnie Francaise des Petroles (areas for which exploration permits are still pending)
5. CPA
6. CREPS
7. SEREPT
8. SNAP
9. CPDT

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